



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Wednesday, 29 October 2008

MOTION: CAIRNS HOSPITAL, ORDER FOR THE PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—LNP) (7.08 pm): I fully support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. There are many important issues out there but the most important issue that will ever come anybody's way is appropriate health care for all Queenslanders. This motion calls for the release of the documents—currently hidden under the guise of cabinet secrecy—that were used to form the basis of the decision not to build a hospital in Cairns for another 15 years. The people of Cairns, the tablelands and rural and remote areas serviced by the Cairns health district deserve answers. The need for a new hospital is paramount to improve the standard of basic health services, specialist services, outreach services and outlying communities serviced by Cairns.

Our current health system is in crisis and this government is attempting to hoodwink the people of far-north Queensland and will not be honest about it. The population of far-north Queensland is set to blow out from 250,000 to 320,000 by 2020 and these numbers will increase. With the shocking state of our health system, the need for the completion of a new hospital in far-north Queensland is paramount.

What is important is that in times of emergency or illness, in life-threatening situations, a bed is available, not a trolley; that we have access to medical surgery when required; and that our cancer patients are not delayed on waiting lists. The buckling health system is not the fault of the public or the fault of the Bjelke-Petersen government, which at the time provided the best health system in the world where we could access medical surgery, maternity services and specialist services in our home town. Queenslanders deserve an answer to the question of what has gone wrong.

They have just closed down the surgical wards at Richmond and Hughenden. They are closing down Aramac Hospital. This is the year 2008. These services should be increasing, not closed down. What sort of government is this? What sort of management is this? The government is downsizing our hospitals from hospitals to health centres. What management do we call this? Consecutive Labor governments, from the Goss government through to the Beattie-Bligh government, have continued with their policy of a bureaucratically controlled health system rather than giving communities the chance to have a say about their local hospitals.

This government has spent millions of dollars promoting what a great job it is doing to save its political hide, rather than doing what is most important—that is, fix our health system. The Premier claims that her government will be more open and accountable than previous governments. This is the opportunity to release the information so that the people of north Queensland and far-north Queensland will know that their desperately needed hospital will not be operational for another 15 years.

The LNP has shown leadership and has launched a real plan—a real vision to get on with the task and provide a plan to commit to a brand-new hospital in Cairns within five years of our winning government. The people of far-north Queensland will have access to a brand-new hospital, not the remodelling or renovating of an old, outdated building. This brand-new, state-of-the-art building will attract and retain quality staff and will be the jewel in the crown that is far-north Queensland.

We have committed to ensuring that no child in need of urgent surgery is left waiting. This is not a Third World country. It is unacceptable for any person to be left waiting for life-saving surgery. It is unforgivable that children, the most vulnerable of our citizens, are left waiting in pain for surgery to save their lives. We will also boost the travel subsidy for patients who require specialist treatment in metropolitan hospitals from 15c a kilometre to 30c a kilometre. Accommodation subsidies will increase from \$30 daily to \$90 daily, because we recognise the financial burden travelling for medical treatment can put on families. As fuel costs increase and the services available in rural areas decrease, it is costing patients, especially the elderly, an arm and a leg to access medical services that were once available in their local hospitals.

Our policy will also provide the opportunity once again for communities to have a greater say in the running of their hospitals so that decisions are made by locals and for locals rather than by centralised, Brisbane based bureaucrats. We will also support existing rural and regional hospitals which, in turn, will alleviate the pressure on larger metropolitan hospitals. Providing this support and focusing on rural hospitals will alleviate pressure from hospitals such as Cairns, Townsville and Mackay. Day after day the health system struggles to manage. An area the size of far-north Queensland deserves a world-class health system to attract staff and retain current staff who work under the most appalling conditions. These people need commending because their dedication to their patients and their commitment to the highest standards of health care is exceptional, particularly considering the boundaries they work in. Far-north Queenslanders deserve a hospital in five years, not a broken-down one in 15.